

# Protect mangroves and help tackle climate change

By Environment Minister of State, Thérèse Coffey

At a time when climate change is front and centre in the public's mind, I have an amazing fact for you: mangroves – the little-known swamp forests found at the edge of tropical coastlines – can absorb up to four times more carbon than a traditional rainforest on land. It's a truly extraordinary figure. Today, on International Day for the Conservation of Mangroves (26 July), I want us all to celebrate this under-appreciated ecosystem for what it truly is; a secret weapon in our fight against climate change.

Mangroves are remarkably productive ecosystems. They are a key contributor to nature-based solutions for example water filtration, shore stabilisation, coastal protection from storms, building materials and as a source of energy. They also support important fisheries, including shrimp and crabs, which are crucial to the livelihoods and food security of coastal people. Mangroves are also important for climate change adaptation, they are 5 times more cost effective than man-made infrastructure in protecting coastal communities from tsunamis and storm surges, as they reduce wave heights by up to 60% and reduce tsunami flood depth by 30%. Despite their immense value, these forests are disappearing at an alarming rate – 35% have been lost already over the past 40 years.

So, if we can protect and plant more of these rapidly disappearing 'blue forests' there might be an opportunity to reduce and trap more carbon in the dark, rich soils at the base of mangrove trees' exposed root systems, benefitting communities across the globe.

Mangroves provide so much for coastal communities around the globe, from food to flood protection.

In 2016 I approved, through International Climate Finance, the establishment of the 'Blue Forests' initiative run by the UK organisation, Blue Ventures. The aim of the project is to reduce deforestation of mangrove habitat, create new sustainable livelihoods, support community health and women's empowerment and increase climate resilience in coastal communities.

Blue Ventures is working on the island of Madagascar to protect and restore some of the world's largest blue forests and help people make sustainable lifestyles through improved fisheries management.

My personal experience of mangroves stems from a visit to Mozambique in September 2018. I saw first-hand how these important habitats can become polluted and affect people's livelihoods. Maputo, the capital city, has a coastline where large extensions of mangrove forests occur within the urban environment, namely the Costa do Sol wetlands, offering a wide range of ecological and economic services. Development pressure is increasing as is

the pollution threat to these important ecological areas. If the mangroves are lost from the city there will be less flood protection from the ocean.

Plastic waste is another environmental challenge in the city and I joined local community groups as part of World Clean Up day to help collect plastic rubbish on the beach at Costa do Sol. Fishery equipment such as big fish nets can get entangled with tree branches trapping and destroying wildlife that in turn prevents local people from fishing to feed their families.

The UK is a global leader in tackling climate change. We are the first major economy to legislate to become a net-zero emissions economy, committing to a target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This builds on the work we've already done, cutting emissions by more than 40% since 1990 thanks to our world-leading legally binding climate targets. Through our support for organisations, such as Blue Ventures, the UK can continue to make a huge impact on people's lives whilst tackling climate change around the globe.